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Thucydides: The Meaning of Political History

This lecture forms part of a series: The Western Tradition—Its Great Ideas and Issues. The Western tradition is threatened today as it never was heretofore. For it is now threatened not only from without but from within as well. It is in a state of disintegration. Those among us who believe in the Western tradition, we Westerners—we *Sapadniks*, as Dostoevski and his friends used to call the Westerners among the Russians—must therefore rally around the flag of the Western tradition. But we must do it in a manner, if not worthy of that noble tradition, at least reminding of it: we must uphold the Western principles in a Western manner; we must not try to drown our doubts in a sea of tearful or noisy assent. We must be aware of the fact that the vitality and the glory of our Western tradition are inseparable from its problematic character. For that tradition has two roots. It consists of two heterogeneous elements, of two elements which are ultimately incompatible with each other—the Hebrew element and the Greek element. We speak, and we speak rightly, of the antagonism between Jerusalem and Athens, between faith and philosophy. Both philosophy and the Bible assert that there is ultimately one thing, and one thing only, needful for man. But the one thing needful proclaimed by the Bible is the very opposite of the one thing needful proclaimed by Greek philosophy. According to the Bible, the one thing needful is obedient love; according to philosophy, the one thing needful is free inquiry. The whole history of the West can be viewed as an ever repeated attempt to achieve a compromise or a synthesis between these two antagonistic principles. But all these attempts have failed, and necessarily so; in every synthesis, however impressive, one element of the synthesis is sacrificed, however subtly, but nonetheless surely, to the other. Philosophy is made, against its meaning, the handmaid of theology, or faith is made, against its

meaning, the handmaid of philosophy. The Western tradition does not allow of a synthesis of its two elements, but only of their tension: this is the secret of the vitality of the West. The Western tradition does not allow a final solution of the fundamental contradiction, a society without contradiction. As long as there will be a Western world, there will be theologians who distrust philosophers, and there will be philosophers who are annoyed by theologians. While rallying around the flag of the Western tradition, let us beware of the danger that we be charmed or bullied into a conformism which would be the inglorious end of the Western tradition.

I must leave it open whether the very principles underlying the Western tradition, i.e., whether philosophy and theology, would allow us to speak of "the Western tradition" in the terms which I have used. Permit me to declare that it is impossible to do so in the last analysis. But it is foolish even to try always to speak in terms which could stand the test of precise analysis. Most of the time our maxim must be that expressed in the words of a Greek poet: "I do not want these highbrow things, I want what the city needs" (Euripides, frag. 16, Nauck ed.; quoted in Aristotle *Politics* 1277a 19–20). As long as we speak politically, i.e., crudely, we are indeed forced to speak of the Western tradition more or less in the terms which I have used.

Now, one of the great ideas or issues of the Western tradition is political history. Political history is as characteristic of the Western tradition as philosophy or science, on the one hand, and belief in revelation, on the other. Since the Western tradition consists of two heterogeneous elements, we must first determine to which of these two elements political history belongs. There cannot be the slightest doubt as regards the answer. As the very terms "politics" and "history" show, political history is of Greek, not of Hebrew, origin.

One may say that the theme of political history is human power, but power viewed sympathetically. Power is a very imprecise term. Let us therefore speak rather of freedom and empire. Political history presupposes that freedom and empire are, not unreasonably, mankind's great objectives—that freedom and empire are legitimate objects of admiration. Freedom and empire elicit the greatest efforts of large bodies of men. That greatness is impressive. That greatness can be seen or felt by everyone, and it is a greatness which affects the fate of everyone. The theme of political history is massive and popular. Political history requires that this massive

and popular theme call forth a massive and popular response. Political history belongs to a political life in which many participate. It belongs to a republican political life, to the polis. Political history will be important only if politics is important. Political history will reach its full stature, it will be of decisive importance, only if politics is of decisive importance. But politics will be of decisive importance only to men who prefer (as some Florentines did) the salvation of their city to the salvation of their souls: to men who are dominated by the spirit of republican virtue, by the spirit of the polis.

Yet men dominated by the spirit of the polis will not be able to be political historians in the full sense of the term. An ancient critic has said that the political historian must be *apolis*, cityless, beyond the city. The political historian must be more than a citizen or even a statesman: he must be a wise man. Political history presupposes that wise men regard political life as sufficiently important to describe it with care and with sympathy, and this presupposition involves a paradox. Wise men will always be inclined to look down on political life, on its hustle and bustle, its glitter and glory. Above all, they will regard it as dull. The political man is constantly forced to have very long conversations with very dull people on very dull subjects. Ninety-nine percent, if not more, of politics is administration. And as for the exciting part, the decision-making, it is inseparable from long periods of mere waiting—of an action which consists in the suspension of doing as well as of thinking. Wise men will always be inclined to see in political life an element of childishness. The wisdom which takes a serious interest in politics must then be the wisdom of men who are, or who have remained, children—in a way. The wise men of Greece were such men. An Egyptian priest said to a Greek: "You Greeks are always children; you are young in soul, every one of you; for therein you possess not a single belief that is ancient and derived from old tradition, nor yet a single piece of learning that is hoary with age" (Plato *Timaeus* 22b). It was the coming together of Greek republicanism with Greek wisdom which generated political history.

Political history presupposes, then, the belief that political activity is of vital importance, and, in addition, a wisdom which enlightens that belief. But while this is the necessary condition of political history, it is obviously not its sufficient condition. Plato and Aristotle were wise men, and they believed that political activity is of vital importance. Yet they were not political historians. What then is the precise character of that wisdom, of that Greek wisdom, which issues in political history?

We are not in the habit of raising this question. We take political history for granted. A tradition of millennia has accustomed us to the existence of political history; political history is a part of the furniture amidst which we have grown up. And for many centuries there was indeed no urgent need for raising the question we have raised. But certain changes which have taken place during the last two centuries force us to be more exacting than our predecessors have been. Since the eighteenth century or so, there has been an ever growing concern with history and an ever growing expansion of history. Political history is at present only one branch among many branches of history and by no means more fundamental or central than any other branch. The comprehensive theme of history is now no longer the political deeds and speeches, but something called "civilization" or "culture." Everything human is thought to be a part of a civilization or of a culture: everything—and hence in particular philosophy. Now if philosophy is essentially part and parcel of a civilization or a culture, philosophy is no longer philosophy in the strict sense. For philosophy in the strict sense is man's effort to liberate himself from the particular premises of any particular civilization or culture.

The development of history in the last two centuries has then led to the consequence that philosophy as truly free inquiry has ceased to be intelligible—that it has ceased to be intelligible as a legitimate and necessary pursuit. For reasons which are too obvious to be in need of being stated, we cannot leave it at that. And since the danger to philosophy stems from history, we are forced to reconsider the whole problem of history. History as such has become a problem for us. To clarify that problem we have to go back to the origin of the tradition of history: we cannot take for granted what the tradition of history has taken for granted. We must raise the question, What originally led wise men to become historians? It is in this spirit that we turn to Thucydides.

Of the many, but not very many, great historians which the West has produced, Thucydides is said to be the most political historian, the greatest political historian of all times, the man who has grasped and articulated most fully the essence of political life, the life of politics as it actually is: i.e., not the application of the principles of the Declaration of Independence but the operation of the principles which were operative in the Louisiana Purchase—"power politics" in its harsh grandeur. At the same time, Thucydides was an urbane Athenian, humane, even gentle—as his portrait indeed shows him to have been. If there is wisdom behind political history, if there is a wisdom justifying political history, it

is most likely to be found in the pages, or between the pages, of Thucydides.

The admiration for Thucydides, which all people of judgment and taste feel, is today qualified by the awareness of some real or alleged deficiencies of Thucydides as a historian. This criticism can be condensed to three points: (a) A political historian is thought to be a man who describes particular situations or particular events; the universal seems to be the domain of the philosopher, or perhaps of the psychologist, the student of human nature. Thucydides' work is primarily devoted to a series of particular events (the Peloponnesian War). At the same time, it is meant to lay bare the eternal or permanent character of political life as such. It is with a view to this fact that Thucydides called his work "a possession for all times": all future generations shall be enabled to understand the substance of the political life of their times by understanding Thucydides' account of the political life of his time.

Thucydides seems to be at the same time and, as it were, in the same breath a historian and a political philosopher. The unity of the particular and the universal makes Thucydides' history singularly attractive, but at the same time singularly annoying. For he does not tell us how this unity of the universal and the particular has to be conceived, how the account of the Peloponnesian War and of nothing but the Peloponnesian War can be an account of political life as such. Thucydides gives an account of something which happened once in one part of the world, but he claims that that account will make intelligible what will happen at any time and anywhere; and he does not explain how this is possible.

(b) No modern political historian would write political history as Thucydides did. I take as an example the best American historian I know, Henry Adams. His history of the first Jefferson administration begins, of course, with a description of the situation in the United States at the time when Jefferson took office. Adams describes at appropriate length the intellectual, social, cultural, and economic conditions of the country at that time. Thucydides is practically silent about such things. He limits himself severely to politics—war, diplomacy, and civil strife. Was he blind to these other things? This would seem to be impossible. Does he then regard these other things—tragedy, comedy, philosophy, painting, sculpture, etc.—as unimportant, or at least as less important than the political things? Apparently. But what were his reasons for holding this view? He does not state them.

(c) There is another embarrassing feature of Thucydides' work.

He records both deeds and speeches. As for the deeds or events, he records them substantially in the way in which a modern historian would. But as for the speeches, he composes them himself. He claims that the speeches which he composed agree with the gist of the speeches as actually delivered. But Thucydides edits them. From the point of view of the present-day historian, this is a kind of forgery. Moreover, Thucydides edits his speeches according to certain canons of rhetoric: all his speakers speak just as Thucydides himself would have spoken; the individuality of the speaker, the local color, etc., are lacking. The speeches are not "natural." They are the speeches not of passionate and inerudite men, but of the perfect orator who has the time and the training to elaborate first-rate speeches and who complies with rules of art that claim to be of universal validity.

These three objections would seem to express the main difficulties which obstruct at present the understanding of Thucydides' work. We must try to overcome these difficulties. But we must try to do something more. The three objections mentioned are typically modern objections. They are based on the assumption that the manner in which the modern historian proceeds is the right manner. They measure Thucydides' work by the standards of modern historiography. But since modern history has brought us into very serious troubles, we cannot accept it as our standard. History as such has become a problem for us. Let us not hesitate, therefore, to wonder whether we are at all entitled to speak of Thucydides' work as a history—and of course also whether we are entitled to ascribe to Thucydides a political philosophy in particular, or a philosophy in general. From all we know prior to a fresh investigation, his enterprise may antedate any possible distinction between history and philosophy. We can safely say no more than this: that Thucydides intended to give a true or a clear or a precise or a detailed account of the war between the Peloponnesians and the Athenians. And we have to raise the question, Why did he decide to write such an account?

The question is apparently answered by the following statement of Thucydides: "I have gone out of my way to speak of [the interval between the Persian and the Peloponnesian War] because the writers who preceded me treat either of Greek affairs previous to the Persian War, or of that war itself. The period following the Persian War has been omitted by all of them with the exception of Hellanicus; and he, when he touched upon it in his *Attic Chronicle*, is very brief and inaccurate in his chronology" (1.97). Here Thucydides

implies that the Greeks ought to have at their disposal a continuous, sufficiently detailed and chronologically correct account of Greek affairs—an account to be composed by successive writers. If history means merely this, Thucydides was obviously familiar with the idea of history, and he accepted it. But the question is whether his own work can be understood in these terms. It suffices to remark that Thucydides makes the statement quoted in order to explain or to excuse what might seem to be an unnecessary digression from his self-chosen task; he does not make that statement when he sets forth the reasons for writing his account of the Peloponnesian War. If it is seen within the context of Thucydides' whole work, the statement quoted almost reads like an emphatic rejection of the view of history which it presupposes. And it is not difficult to see why Thucydides rejects this notion of history, the vulgar notion of history. When he gives his reason for writing the account of the Peloponnesian War, he stresses the singular importance of that event. The vulgar notion of history does not make allowance for the difference between the important and the unimportant; it lets its light shine with perfect impartiality or indifference on all periods, on the unimportant as well as the important ones.

Why then did Thucydides choose his theme? He states in the beginning of his work that he wrote it because he believed that the Peloponnesian War was the most noteworthy of all wars up to now, that it was the biggest war in which Greeks were involved. The bigness of the war is not only the reason for writing a true and detailed account of the war; it is also a most important element of that account itself. One does not know the truth about the Peloponnesian War if one does not know that it was the biggest war, or at any rate the biggest Greek war. The proof given in the first twenty or so chapters of Thucydides' history that the Peloponnesian War is the biggest war is an essential element of that history, and not merely an introduction to that history.

Now, it is one thing to *believe* that the Peloponnesian War is the biggest war and another thing to know it. This knowledge can only be acquired by argument. For the superior bigness of the Peloponnesian War is not self-evident. After all, the contemporaries of every war believe that their war was the biggest. Fifty years prior to the Peloponnesian War there had been the Persian War, another big war. In fact the Persian War would seem to us to be the only competitor of the Peloponnesian War in regard to bigness, and indeed a most serious competitor. Thucydides disposes of the claim

of the Persian War to superior bigness in two sentences. The issue seems to be settled: the Peloponnesian War is the biggest war. Yet Thucydides wrote at least nineteen chapters in order to prove his contention that the Peloponnesian War is the biggest war. Obviously the Peloponnesian War had another serious competitor. But what other war could possibly be thought to be bigger than the Peloponnesian War? There can be only one answer: the Trojan War. Both the Trojan War and the Peloponnesian War were common enterprises of all Greece; both lasted very long; and both caused very great sufferings. A generation after Thucydides, Isocrates still maintained that the Trojan War was the biggest Greek war. It was then absolutely necessary for Thucydides to prove that the Trojan War was definitely less big than the Peloponnesian War. He proved this by proving the weakness of the ancients: the Greeks of the time of the Trojan War were utterly incapable of waging war on a big scale.

Now the fame of the Trojan War was decisively due to the poems of Homer. The prestige of the Trojan War was due to the prestige of Homer; therefore, by questioning the prestige of the Trojan War, Thucydides questions the prestige of Homer. By proving the weakness of the ancients—their weakness in regard to power, to wealth, and to daring—Thucydides proves that the stories of the ancients are unreliable and untrue: he proves the weakness of the ancients in regard to wisdom, and in particular the weakness of Homer in regard to wisdom. By proving this superiority of the Greeks who were engaged in the Peloponnesian War, Thucydides proves the superiority of his own wisdom. Except for Thucydides' work, the glamor of the past—a glamor decisively enhanced by Homer's charm—would always overshadow the true superiority of the present. Thucydides confronts us, then, with the choice between Homeric wisdom and Thucydidean wisdom. Just as his contemporary Plato, he engages in a contest with Homer.

Homer was a poet, and in fact *the* poet. What is a poet? The term "poet" does not yet occur in Homer. We do find in Homer singers or minstrels. The difference between the singer or minstrel and the poet consists in this: that the poet is known to be a maker or producer of things which exist only by virtue of his making or producing, although they present themselves as if they existed without the poet's making. Poetry is fiction. Poetry, as distinguished from song, presupposes an awareness of the difference between fiction and truth, and concern with that difference, i.e., concern with the truth. The poet tells the truth—the truth about

man—through fiction. The fiction consists primarily in magnifying and adorning, therewith concealing most important truths about men. To take an example from Thucydides: "I am inclined to think that Agamemnon succeeded in collecting the expedition [against Troy] not because the suitors of Helen had bound themselves by oath to Tyndareus, but because he was the most powerful king of his age. . . . And it was, I believe, because Agamemnon inherited this power and also because he was the greatest naval potentate of his time that he was able to assemble the expedition, and the other kings followed him, not from generosity or gratitude, but from fear" (1.9). Homer obscures the fact that political life—the relations between cities and kings—is characterized by the absence, by the almost complete absence, of *charis*, which is the opposite of necessity or compulsion. Hence, considering the fact that all higher human life is life in cities, Homer gives us a wholly untrue picture of human life as such: human life exists always in the shadow of that dread compulsion.

The new wisdom is then superior to the old wisdom as wisdom, as knowledge of the truth. But Homer was admired because he revealed the truth which he knew in a way that was most pleasing or enjoyable. It is important to note that Thucydides does not simply deny that his wisdom will be enjoyable too: "The nonstorylike character of my account will perhaps appear to be less pleasing to the ear" (1.22): i.e., it will not appear less pleasing than Homer's poetry to those whose ears have been properly trained. Thucydides' severe and austere wisdom too is music; it is inspired by a muse, by a higher, and therefore by a severer and austerer, muse than was Homer's.

We have raised the question, What is the character of that Greek wisdom which issues in political history? We have seen that Thucydides' wisdom presents itself as a substitute for Homeric wisdom, or rather as the consummation of Homeric wisdom. Homeric wisdom reveals the character of human life by presenting deeds and speeches which are magnified and adorned. Thucydides's wisdom reveals the character of human life by presenting deeds and speeches which are not magnified and adorned. This is obviously quite insufficient as an answer to our question. Even granting that Thucydides has successfully challenged the superiority of the *Iliad* by his account of the war, what about the *Odyssey*? Above all, granted that the unity of the universal and the particular in Thucydides is fundamentally the same as the unity of the universal and the particular in Homer, why does wisdom require such

unity? Is not wisdom understanding of the universal, of the universal character of human life? Why is it then necessary that wisdom should appear in the presentation of deeds and speeches? We must then repeat our question: What is the character of that Greek wisdom which issues in political history? What is the character of that concern with the universal character of human life which issues in the true and detailed account of the Peloponnesian War? The question is identical with the question as to why Thucydides chose as his theme the Peloponnesian War. For by raising the question of why Thucydides chose his theme, we imply that he had alternatives and that these alternatives have something in common with the theme actually chosen (otherwise they would not be alternatives to it): i.e., we discover something in Thucydides' theme which is common to the Peloponnesian War and other possible themes; we discover something more general than the Peloponnesian War, we raise it to the general and even to the universal.

Thucydides chose the Peloponnesian War because it was the most noteworthy of all wars up to his time, or because it was the biggest of all Greek wars up to his time. He presupposed that war is a theme worthy of the attention of a wise man. Since his account of the Peloponnesian War is meant to be a guide for the understanding of all future wars, the Peloponnesian War must have had a particular fitness for the understanding of war as such, and this must be due to the fact that it was the biggest Greek war known to Thucydides. First, what is the virtue of bigness? We find the answer in Plato's *Republic*. Socrates is seeking the truth about justice together with his young friends. At his suggestion they look at a just city and not at a just individual because the city is larger or bigger than the individual: "There is likely to be more justice in the larger thing, and hence justice will be there more easy to apprehend" (368e). By looking at the larger or bigger thing, they will see justice written large. Similarly, by looking at the largest or biggest war, Thucydides is studying war writ large: the universal character of war will be more visible in the biggest war than in smaller wars, and there will be more war in the biggest than in smaller wars.

But future Greek wars might be still bigger than the Peloponnesian War and might therefore reveal the character of Greek war still more fully than the Peloponnesian War. Thucydides sets our mind at rest: the Greeks were at their peak in every respect at the time of the Peloponnesian War. The Peloponnesian War is the complete Greek war. No future Greek war can bring to light anything rele-

vant regarding Greek wars which was not observable clearly in the Peloponnesian War.

But the nature of Greek war is one thing; the nature of war as such is another thing. Yet let us assume that it is impossible to grasp the true character of the complete Greek war without grasping the character of non-Greek war, of barbarian war—in that case, grasping the character of the complete or final Greek war would be tantamount to understanding the character of war as such. Thucydides makes precisely this assumption; he calls the biggest Greek war the most noteworthy war simply.

But even a complete understanding of the nature of war would seem to be a far cry from understanding the nature of human life. After all, man's true life, as no one knew better then Thucydides, is a life of peace. If Thucydides challenged Homer, if he believed that his wisdom should supersede Homeric wisdom, he must have believed that by understanding the nature of war one understands the nature of human life.

Thucydides calls the biggest war by a more general term: the biggest *kinesis*, the biggest movement. War is a kind of movement, just as peace is a kind of rest. Movement is opposed to rest. The biggest movement is the opposite of the biggest rest. The biggest movement presupposes that the antagonists possess the maximum of power and wealth. This maximum of power and wealth has been built up or stored up during a very long period—during a much longer period than the biggest movement lasted. It was built up and stored up, not in and through movement, but in and through rest. This means: the biggest movement is preceded in time by the biggest rest. But rest is not the primary or initial situation of man. If we go back to the past, we see that earlier man had much less power and wealth than present man, and that this weakness and poverty was due to the preponderance of movement in the olden times. In the beginning, in the oldest times, there was complete absence of rest, there was nothing but movement: no settlement, no fearless or quiet intercourse, no order. Wealth and power emerged through rest. The movement from the beginning up to the Peloponnesian War was on the whole a progress—a progress in power and wealth. The initial movement or unrest lasted for a very long time. Compared with the span of time involved, the progress through rest is of very short duration, though of much longer duration than the climactic movement (i.e, the Peloponnesian War). The biggest movement is a movement in which the peak of power and wealth is used and used up. The

biggest movement presupposes the biggest rest. Therefore it is impossible to understand the biggest movement without understanding simultaneously the biggest rest. One cannot understand the biggest war without understanding the biggest peace, the peace which, as it were, culminates in the biggest war. But, as Homer has shown by his *Iliad* and *Odyssey,* and as the greatest epic poet of modern times has shown by the very title of his greatest work, war and peace comprise the whole of human life. To understand the biggest war means, then, to grasp fully the whole of human life. Everything becomes visible in the biggest movement, and it becomes visible only now—with the emergence of the biggest movement itself. The biggest Greek war is the most noteworthy war: it is the most noteworthy war simply because it is the biggest Greek war. For one cannot understand the biggest Greek war without understanding at the same time all possibilities of non-Greek wars—for the same reason for which one cannot understand the biggest war without understanding at the same time the biggest peace.

The Greek is distinguished from, and opposed to, the barbaric or barbarian, just as war is opposed to peace. The process in which power and wealth were stored up or built up is also the process in which the Greeks became distinguished from the barbarians. The very name "Greek" is recent. So is the Greek way of life. Originally the Greeks lived like barbarians; originally they *were* barbarians. In the beginning there were no Greeks, and therefore no distinction between Greeks and barbarians. In the beginning, in the initial, complete unrest or movement, all men were indiscriminately barbarians. Rest, long rest, and the biggest rest, is the condition not only for building up power and wealth, but for the emergence of Greekness as well. Yet there are many more barbarians in the world than there are Greeks: Greekness is the exception, just as the period of initial unrest was so much longer than the period of rest. Rest and Greekness are the exception, an island in the ocean of unrest and barbarism. The biggest rest is that rest in which Greekness not only emerges but reaches its peak. Thucydides' own work, no negligible element of the peak of Greekness, required some rest in the very midst of the biggest unrest. The initial unrest is characterized by weakness, poverty, barbarism, noise, confusion, and fear. At the peak of the biggest rest, which partly extends into the biggest unrest, there is power, wealth, the arts, refinement, order, daring, and even the overcoming of poetic magnification by the sober quest for truth.

The Peloponnesian War is the climactic Greek war. As such it reveals completely both all possibilities of war and of peace, and all possibilities of barbarism and of Greekness. All human life moves between the poles of war and peace, and between the poles of barbarism and Greekness. Thus by understanding the Peloponnesian War, one grasps the limits of all human things. One understands the nature of all human things. One understands all human things completely.

Thucydides gives a detailed account of the Peloponnesian War, which was a particular event. But this particular event is the only phenomenon in which the nature of human things or of human life becomes fully visible because in it the peak of Greekness, and therewith the peak of humanity, becomes fully visible; we see the beginning of the descent. We see the limitation of the peak. For war, or movement, is destructive. And that particular movement which is the Peloponnesian War is destructive of the highest. The biggest rest finds not its culmination but its end in the biggest movement. The biggest movement weakens and endangers, nay, destroys, not only power and wealth but Greekness as well. The biggest movement leads very soon to that unrest within cities, that *stasis*, which is identical with re-barbarization. The most savage and murderous barbarism, which was slowly overcome by the building up of Greekness, reappears in the Peloponnesian War. The war brings murderous barbarians into the midst of Greece as allies of the Greeks engaged in fratricidal war. Thracians murder the children attending a Greek school. The Peloponnesian War reveals the extremely endangered character of Greekness. Original *kinesis*, original chaos, comes into its own. It reveals itself as the permanent basis of derivative rest, of derivative order, of derivative Greekness. By understanding the biggest unrest Thucydides understands the limits of human possibilities. His knowledge is final knowledge. It is wisdom.

The fact that barbarism is primary and ultimately victorious, or that Greekness is derivative, does not prove that Greekness is merely apparent and not real. Greekness is not reducible to barbarism; it cannot be conceived of as a modification of barbarism. When Thucydides describes the emergence of Greekness in the first twenty chapters, he does not mention justice. But he mentions justice immediately when he starts his detailed account of the peak of Greekness. Justice is not operative in the emergence of civilization, but it is there just as soon as there is civilization.

To understand the character of Greekness we must look at it as

it unfolds its being in the pages of Thucydides. The war which he narrates is a war between the Peloponnesians and the Athenians. On the one side, we see one city and its subject cities; on the other side we see many cities. But we learn soon that the core of the Peloponnesian confederacy is one city: Sparta. The war is the war between Athens and Sparta. Greekness at its peak has two poles, Sparta and Athens—just as human life moves between the two poles of war and peace, and of barbarism and Greekness. To understand Greekness means therefore to understand the difference between Sparta and Athens—to understand the character of Sparta and Athens, the specific limitations of Sparta and Athens, the specific virtues of Sparta and Athens.

Thucydides exercises great restraint in speaking of virtues and of vices, in praising and in blaming. It is therefore easy to mistake his meaning. Mistakes are inevitable if one follows one's impressions instead of following the signposts erected by Thucydides himself. These signposts are the words of praise and blame which he utters in his own name.

Probably the most famous section of Thucydides' work is Pericles' funeral speech, this noble praise of Periclean Athens. Thucydides seems to identify himself completely with Periclean Athens, and therewith with Pericles himself. In addition Thucydides bestows his praise on Pericles. Yet Thucydides never says that Pericles was the best or the most virtuous man of his age: his praise of Pericles is qualified. And as for the funeral speech, it is delivered by Pericles, not by Thucydides. The funeral speech is a political action of Pericles. It must be read accordingly. In the funeral speech, the leading Athenian citizen characterizes Athens by contrasting her with Sparta. This speech is closely parallel to the speech delivered by the Corinthians in Sparta, in which they too contrast Sparta and Athens. In the situation in which the Corinthians found themselves in Sparta, it was impossible for them to praise Sparta unqualifiedly, for they were dissatisfied with Sparta: their speech served the function of bringing about a change of Spartan policy. But Pericles' funeral speech serves precisely the function of defending Athenian policy, of keeping Athenian policy unchanged. As a result, we find in Thucydides an Athenian praising Athens unqualifiedly, whereas we do not find anyone praising Sparta accordingly. No Spartan praises Sparta in the way in which Pericles praises Athens. This proves indeed that Sparta was less articulate or infinitely more laconic than Athens. It does not prove at all that Sparta did not deserve the highest praise. Sparta is in-

articulate; she is praised by others, therefore she is not praised unqualifiedly, because the others, having different political interests than she, are naturally not enthusiastic about her.

Thucydides has stated the principles which guided him in judging of human things in the section on civil strife in the third book. When describing civil strife and its effect, the disintegration of the city, the diseases of the city, the decay of civilization, he makes clear which preferences correspond to the healthy city and which preferences correspond to the decayed city. One point only needs to be mentioned in the present context. The healthy city esteems most highly the virtue of moderation; the diseased city is enamored of daring, of what is called manliness, which it prefers to moderation. Moderation is akin to peace; daring and manliness belong to war. These statements allow us to assert without hesitation that the moral taste of Thucydides is identical with the moral taste of Plato. I dare say that it is identical with the moral taste of all wise men, i.e., of all great thinkers prior to the modern era.

How then must we judge of Sparta and Athens in the light of the fundamental distinction between moderation and daring? The Spartans above all others, Thucydides says, preserved moderation in prosperity. By this statement, Thucydides subscribes to what some of his characters say in praise of the Spartans—of their moderation, their slowness, their hesitancy, their quietude, their reliability, their sense of dignity—in brief, their old-fashioned habits. Sparta, Thucydides says again in his own name, obtained good laws at an earlier period than any other city and has never been subject to tyrants; she has preserved the same regime for more than four hundred years. The infrequency of Thucydides' explicit praise of Sparta does not prove its irrelevance. The value of a statement of a thoughtful man is not increased by his repeating it often. It is obvious what the praise of Spartan moderation implies: the Athenians did not preserve moderation in prosperity. Athens was animated by a spirit of daring innovation, at least since the time of Themistocles. No one could say in praise of Athens that she had never been subject to tyrants or always preserved the same regime. But nevertheless Thucydides might still have regarded the Periclean regime as the best which Athens ever had. In fact he did not; he definitely prefers the short-lived regime of 411, which was a good mixture of oligarchy and democracy, to the Periclean regime. As all wise men of classical antiquity, Thucydides favored a mixed or moderate regime. And Athenian democracy was not moderate. It is true that Pericles kept it in a tolerable shape, but

this merely means that the fate of Athens depended entirely on one man's virtue. It means that Athenian democracy had to rely constitutionally on utterly unreliable chance. A sound regime is one in which a fairly large group that lives on a reasonably high level of civic virtue, and above all of moderation, is in control: a moderate regime. Thus, however great the merits of Pericles, his rule is inseparable from Athenian democracy; it belongs to Athenian democracy; the political judgment on Pericles' rule must be based on a clear understanding of the unsolid character of the foundation of that rule. The political preferences of Thucydides—I am speaking now of politics, not of political philosophy—are the same as Plato's. Now, Pericles, as Thucydides saw him, did not only belong to democracy; he was even in profound harmony with the democracy which he served and saved as well as he could. It is significant that Thucydides' Pericles never uses the term moderation. Especially the funeral speech shows that Pericles' preferences agree in substance with those which Thucydides himself ascribes to the diseased city: Pericles too prefers daring to moderation. There is a close link connecting the funeral speech, and even the first speech of the Athenians in Thucydides' history, with what the Athenians say in their famous, or infamous, dialogue with the Melians.

Thucydides has indicated his view of Sparta and Athens most clearly in the following form. The first group of speeches in his history are the speeches of the Corcyreans and the Corinthians in Athens; the second group of speeches are the speeches of the Corinthians, the Athenians, a Spartan king, and a Spartan *ephor* in Sparta. In the first group, the speeches delivered in Athens, Thucydides records no speech of the Athenians, but two contradictory decisions of the Athenians; in Athens there was no deliberation but hasty, fickle decisions—in fact, the decision which brought on the Peloponnesian War. In the second group of speeches, the speeches delivered in Sparta, Thucydides records two speeches of the Spartans and one decision of the Spartans: deliberation followed by a firm decision. Later on in the first book Thucydides gives the record of an assembly in Athens: there is only one speech; the speaker is Pericles; Pericles' monarchical rule gives Athens her direction. But Pericles will die soon.

Yet Thucydides cannot have been blind to the glory which was Athens, a glory which is inseparable from the spirit of daring innovation and from that madness, that *mania*, which rises far above moderation. In fact, Thucydides draws our attention to another

facet of the difference between Sparta and Athens by contrasting the Spartan individual and the Athenian individual. In a sense Thucydides' history begins with the confrontation of the Spartan Pausanias and the Athenian Themistocles. This confrontation has been misunderstood as a digression into biography. In fact, it is not so much Pausanias and Themistocles in whom Thucydides is interested, as Sparta and Athens as manifested in these two men. Both men are individuals, and this means primarily men who deviate from the norm, i.e., criminals: both men were traitors to their city. Their crimes were connected with the Persian War, i.e., with another big movement. Yet in this earlier movement, which was less big than the Peloponnesian War, demoralization was still limited to particularly exposed individuals. Now, Thucydides is silent about Pausanias' nature and character. But he dwells on Themistocles' extraordinary gifts. He is silent about Themistocles' character and willpower in order to bring out more clearly the amazing intellectual power of the originator of the Athenian Empire. Sparta is the better polis; but Athens is outstanding as regards natural gifts, and this means regarding the gifts of individuals.

Moreover we cannot help noting a close parallel between Pericles' speeches and Thucydides' history. Thucydides' account at the beginning of his work of the increase of power and wealth which had been taking place at an ever accelerated pace for at least two generations is repeated by Pericles at the beginning of his funeral speech. Thucydides and Pericles agree in their consciousness of an amazing progress achieved—in their consciousness that they are living on a peak. Thucydides himself is an Athenian: the peak on which he stand is the peak of Athens. Pericles looks down, just as Thucydides himself, on the exaggerated glamor of the heroic age sung by Homer. And Pericles observes, just as Thucydides himself, icy silence about the gods. Thucydides' own work is a work of daring innovation. What he described in his section on civil strife as an essential characteristic of political decay, viz., the loss of awe of the divine law, is an essential element of his own manner of looking at things. Rest leads necessarily to admiration of antiquity. By freeing himself from the admiration of antiquity, Thucydides reveals his kinship with the spirit of restless daring or of impiety.

Yet there is a subtle and therefore decisive difference between Thucydides and Pericles, and therewith between Thucydides and Periclean Athens. Both Thucydides and Pericles are concerned with inextinguishable fame. Pericles says that "we Athenians have

left everywhere behind us eternal memorials of evil things and of good things" (2.43). Thucydides says of the work which he has left behind that it is to be an eternal possession which is useful, i.e., which is good (1.22). I shall not insult your intelligence by belaboring the difference between memorials which can only be looked at and possessions which are meant to be owned; the difference between memorials which are meant for show and a possession which is for use, for the noblest use, for understanding; and the difference between an achievement which is partly bad and partly good and an achievement which is simply good. The spirit of daring innovation, that *mania* which transcends the limits of moderation, comes into its own, or is legitimate, or is in accordance with nature, only in the work of Thucydides—not in Periclean Athens as such. Not Periclean Athens, but the understanding that is possible on the basis of Periclean Athens, is the peak. Not Periclean Athens, but Thucydides' history, is the peak. Thucydides redeems Periclean Athens. And only by redeeming it does he preserve it. As little as there would be an Achilles or an Odysseus for us without Homer, so little would there be a Pericles for us without Thucydides. There is a disproportion between the politically best and the humanly best: the humanly best, wisdom, is akin to the politically inferior or an offspring of it. This is the meaning of the kinship between Thucydides and Periclean Athens.

The subtle and decisive difference between Thucydides and Pericles confirms our contention that Thucydides regarded Sparta as superior to Athens from a political point of view. Or in general terms, Thucydides held the view that political virtue or political health is identical with the spirit of moderation or of respect for the divine law. Certainly Thucydides did not believe that the gods avenge injustice. He did not believe in a power of justice. The first speech recorded in his work begins with the word justice; the immediately following contradictory speech begins with the word necessity. Thucydides is impressed by the conflict between justice and necessity, a conflict in which necessity proves to be stronger. Necessity does not allow the cities always to act justly. The men who open their speech with the word justice are the Corcyreans; the men who open their speech with the word necessity are the Corinthians. The Corcyreans are definitely less just than the Corinthians. But with a view to necessity the Athenians may have acted wisely by allying themselves with the unjust Corcyreans against the tolerably just Corinthians. Necessity means involvement: Potidaea is a colony of Corinth and an ally of Athens; Poti-

daea is forced to break her promises in case of conflict between Corinth and Athens.

Thucydides does not say that necessity simply rules the relation between cities. For example, he does not say that the Peloponnesian War was simply necessary. There exist alternatives. There is room for choice between sensible and mad courses, between moderate and immoderate courses; there is room even, within limits, for choice between just and unjust courses. Still, the virtue which can and must control political life, as Thucydides sees it, is not so much justice as moderation. Moderation is something more than long-range calculation. It is, to use the language of Aristotle, a moral virtue. In most cases moderation is produced by fear of the gods and of the divine law. But it is also produced by true wisdom. In fact, the ultimate justification of moderation is exclusively true wisdom. For, by denying the power of the gods, Thucydides does not deny the power of nature, or more specifically the limitations imposed on man by his nature. There are then natural sanctions to immoderate courses. Immoderate courses may succeed, for chance is incalculable. But precisely for this reason, for the reason that an immoderate policy counts on chance, it is bad: it is not according to nature. "Thus ended the great expedition of the Athenians and their allies against Egypt" (1.110): It ended in disaster. "This was the end of Pausanias the Spartan and of Themistocles the Athenian, the two most famous Greeks of their day" (1.138): they ended in disaster. The extreme courses end in disaster. The right thing is the mean.

We can now venture to suggest an answer to the question as to why Thucydides is silent about what is at present called Athenian culture and why he limits his narrative so severely to things political. What we call culture would have been called by Thucydides, I suppose, love of the beautiful and love of wisdom. As Thucydides' strictures on Homer show, he assigned the highest place not to the beautiful but to wisdom. The question therefore is, Why was Thucydides silent about the wisdom that had found its home in Athens? Through his history Thucydides makes us understand movement and rest, war and peace, barbarism and Greekness, Sparta and Athens: he makes us understand the nature of human life; he makes us wise. By understanding Thucydides' wisdom, we ourselves become wise; but we cannot become wise through understanding Thucydides without realizing simultaneously that it is through understanding Thucydides that we are becoming wise, for wisdom is inseparable from self-knowledge. By becoming wise

through understanding Thucydides, we see Thucydides' wisdom. But we know from Thucydides himself that he was an Athenian. And through understanding him we see that his wisdom was made possible by Athens—by her power and wealth, by her defective polity, by her spirit of daring innovation, by her active doubt of the divine law. By understanding Thucydides' history we see that Athens was the home of wisdom. For only through becoming wise ourselves can we recognize wisdom in others, and particularly in Thucydides, and also, in a way, in Athens. Wisdom cannot be presented as a spectacle, in the way in which military and political transactions can be presented. Wisdom cannot be said. It can only be done or practiced. Wisdom can only be seen by indirection, by reflection: by reflecting on our being or becoming wise. Only through understanding Thucydides' history can we really see that Athens was the school of Greece. From Pericles' mouth we merely hear it asserted. Wisdom canot be said. It cannot be presented by being spoken of. An indirect proof of this is the insipid, or at best boring, character of the chapters on the intellectual life of the various periods which occur in otherwise good modern political histories. If someone were to draw the conclusion that intellectual history is, strictly speaking, impossible, that intellectual history is an absurd attempt to present descriptively what is by its nature incapable of being described, I would be forced to agree with that man. Fortunately for us students of intellectual history, there is no such man.

By answering the question as to why Thucydides is silent about Athenian culture, we have found, not indeed the answer, but the thread which will eventually lead to the answer to another question: the question regarding the status of the speeches in Thucydides.

Wisdom cannot be shown by being spoken of. How then can it be shown at all? Wisdom is the highest form of the life of man. How can the life of man be shown? The life of man, or, if you wish, the inner life of man, man's awareness in the widest sense, shows itself in deeds and in speeches, but mostly in such a manner that neither the deeds by themselves nor the speeches by themselves suffice to reveal it. To take the most simple example: one man makes just speeches and does just deeds; another man makes just speeches and does unjust deeds; a third one makes unjust speeches and does unjust deeds; and a fourth one makes unjust speeches and does just deeds. In every case we see the man only when we both hear his speeches and see his deeds. And in

every case the contribution made by the perception of the speeches on the one hand, and by the perception of the deeds on the other, is different. What is true of men applies also to measures or policies. Every policy proceeds from deliberation, from speech; speech is the cause of deed. Yet the speech, the deliberation, is itself based on consideration of facts, of deeds. Speech is neither the beginning nor the end, but a station on the way, or rather a beacon which illumines the way. Only through speech are the deeds or the facts revealed. Yet while revealing, speech also conceals or deceives. The speech, or the deliberation, does not control the outcome: it has no power over chance. The speech may be based on misapprehension of one kind or another. And the speech may be meant to deceive. The speech is meant to reveal the causes or reasons of the deed, but it states only the defensible reasons, which may or may not be the true reasons. The deeds without the speeches are meaningless, or at best wholly ambiguous. But the speeches add an ambiguity of their own. The light which the speeches throw on the deeds is not the light of truth. Speech distorts reality. But this distortion is part of reality. It is part of the truth.

Speeches are not only inseparable from deeds. They are even, in an important respect, primary. Thucydides sometimes uses the distinction between speech and deed synonymously with the distinction between speech and secrecy: what comes first to perception, what is least concealed, is what people openly say. The first word of the first speech in Thucydides is justice. If we knew only what the agents say about their policies, we would be forced to believe that all policies are just and all actors perfect gentlemen. Political speeches are primarily justifications. Justification is not limited to considerations of justice; policies are also justified by their expediency. To judge rightly of political life means to judge rightly of the relative importance of justice on the one hand and of expediency on the other. Sound judgment requires that we view the speeches in the light of the deeds. But on the other hand, we could not perceive the light of the deeds if we did not view the deeds in the light of the speeches, i.e., of the claim to justice. It might seem that as a result of a critical examination of deeds and speeches, justice loses its status. Yet this is not quite true. One kind of speech is a treaty or a promise. The value of a treaty or promise depends on the reliability of the partners, on the agreement or disagreement between their previous deeds and speeches, on their previous performance, i.e., on their justice. And all cities are forced to conclude treaties from time to time.

There are things which can be revealed only by speeches. These are the virtues and vices which belong essentially to the element of speech; e.g., cleverness in speaking, elegance of expression, frankness, both noble and shameless, and, above all, wisdom itself.

Human life moves between the poles of war and peace, of barbarism and Greekness, and of deed and speech. But the relationship of deed and speech is much more complex than the relationship of war and peace on the one hand and of barbarism and Greekness on the other. One may wonder whether the dualism of deed and speech is not the very core of human life. Be this as it may, when Thucydides set out to give a true account of the biggest unrest and therewith to lay bare the nature of human life, he was bound to have at his disposal an adequate articulation of the dualism of deed and speech. He had to present that dualism in action, in deed—by speech. He had to imitate that dualism appropriately. Thus he imitated the primacy of speech as follows. He makes a distinction between the spoken or avowed reasons for the Peloponnesian War and its concealed reason. He describes first the facts referred to in the avowed reasons (the Corcyrean and the Potidaean affairs) and thereafter the fact referred to in the concealed reason (the fear of Athenian power). He thus incidentally inverts the chronological order of events. This is a measure of the importance he attaches to the primacy of speech. He leads us to expect that the real reason for the Peloponnesian War is the concealed reason. But a closer study shows that the avowed reasons were much more real than they seemed to be at first (i.e., the Corcyrean affair was the decisive cause of the Peloponnesian War). Thucydides thus warns us of the danger which consists in trusting implicitly our distrust, our reasonable distrust, of what people say. The warning is, of course, only noticeable to those who harbor such reasonable distrust. For others the warning would be meaningless: they will not notice it in Thucydides.

A further example of Thucydides' imitation of the dualism of deed and speech: Thucydides refrains from giving us his complete judgments on men and politics. All his judgments are incomplete and therefore conceal as much as they reveal. He presents to us the deeds and the speeches just as reality presents them. He does not tell us how we should judge of the speeches in the light of the deeds and vice versa. Since we primarily understand speeches, Thucydides misleads us by presenting speeches to us, just as reality misleads us by the speeches we hear. Furthermore his characters say things which Thucydides does not say: the reader must

find out for himself what Thucydides thought on the subject in question, i.e., what the wise judgment on the subject in question is. Thucydides imitates the enigmatic character of reality. By imitating the dualism of speech and deed, Thucydides reveals the true character of human life to those who can become wise, i.e., to those who can possibly understand the true character of human life.

We may thus understand why Thucydides presented to us both the deeds and the speeches. But we do not yet see clearly why he composed the speeches of his characters himself. After all, he intended to give an exact or true account of the war, and hence of both the deeds and speeches. Accordingly, he ought to have presented the speeches in indirect form, or else, if he had at his disposal something like stenograms, he ought to have transcribed the stenograms without making any other changes. But in fact he preserved only the gist of the speeches actually delivered. Everything else, i.e., the speeches as we read them in his history, are his own work: he himself expressed the gist of the speeches actually delivered as he saw fit. The case of the deeds is entirely different. Deeds cannot migrate from the battlefield into books except by being narrated. Deeds must necessarily be transposed into the element of speech. But speeches exist from the outset in the element of speech. They can migrate from the forum into a book as they are, without being transposed into another element. If any proof were needed it would be supplied by the fact that Thucydides incorporates texts of treaties verbatim. (In fact this proves that the treaties are not speeches but deeds.)

Two observations suggest themselves immediately. In the first place, Thucydides edited the speeches because he was certain that only by such editing could the speeches become true: the verbatim report of the speech would not be the true speech. Secondly, the deeds too are edited by Thucydides. Their presentation consists not merely in their being told, but above all in their being selected and arranged. Only through proper selection and proper arrangement do we get a true picture of the Peloponnesian War. Now, if a speech were left in its original condition, i.e., in the condition in which every citizen present had heard it, it would be as untrue as, say, a battle as observed by every soldier. The true battle is the battle as seen by the man of the highest military understanding. The true speech is the speech as heard by the man of the highest political understanding. The transposition of the deeds through narration, selection, and arrangement must be paralleled by a corresponding transposition of the speeches.

Yet could the transposition not have been effected if Thucydides had presented the speeches in the form of indirect speech? Such presentation would, however, blur the most important fact that the speeches exist in the same element as Thucydides' history, i.e., Thucydides' own *logos*, his own speech. And Thucydides was very anxious to emphasize this kinship between the speeches of his characters and his own speech. The speeches are present in Thucydides' history to a much higher degree than are the deeds: we do not see the deeds, but we hear the speeches. The speeches are present because they can be present, because they belong to the same element as Thucydides' speech. Thucydides was very anxious to emphasize the kinship between the speeches of his characters and his own speech because he was very anxious to bring out the difference between the speeches of his own characters and his own speech. The specific difference cannot be brought to light if the community of the genus is not seen in full clarity. What then is the specific difference between the speeches of Thucydides' characters and Thucydides' own speeches? And why does the specific character of the speeches of the characters require that these speeches be edited by Thucydides in order to become true? The speeches of the characters are political speeches: each speech presents a particular policy of this city to this audience. Each speech is radically partial. As such it does not properly reveal the whole. Yet it exists only within the whole, within the true whole, i.e., within the whole as Thucydides saw it. The man who delivered the actual speech did not see what he said in its true place within the whole: Thucydides sees it within the whole, i.e., as part of the biggest unrest, which was the complete unrest or unrest incarnate, and therewith completely revealing of the biggest rest as well or of barbarism and Greekness, or of the true character of human life. The true account of the true character of human life is Thucydides' own *logos*. Editing a political speech means to integrate it into the true and comprehensive speech. It means therefore to make the political speech visible as something fundamentally different from the true speech. The political speech is essentially untrue because of the necessarily limited horizon of the political actor. Connected with this difference is the following one: the political speech exercises much less reserve in praising and blaming than does the true speech.

I will try to indicate the virtues of the Thucydidean speeches by discussing briefly one example: the speech of the Athenian ambassadors in Sparta. Thucydides prefaces that speech with a statement as to what the Athenians meant to say: i.e., he tells us what

he usually does not tell us, what the gist of the speech actually delivered was. He thus enables us to see clearly the character of his own editorial work. Thucydides says that the Athenians "also desired to set forth the power of their city" (1.72). But how do they set forth the power of Athens in the speech composed by Thucydides? Only indirectly. They justify Athenian policy, i.e., Athenian imperialism, by frankly confessing the very *principle* of imperialism. It is only by doing this that they reveal the power of Athens. They thus reveal the power of Athens much more convincingly than if they had enumerated her resources. For only the most powerful can afford to utter the principles which they utter. By thus editing the speech, Thucydides lets us see that Athens in whose name the ambassadors spoke. I can here merely note that the same speech proves, proves by itself, the amazing resourcefulness, the fastidious urbanity, and the greatness of the soul of Athens, and therewith one reason, never stated, why the Athenians were so offensive to their neighbors. It is safe to assume that Thucydides surpassed in fastidiousness these nameless Athenians. And we can perhaps guess how Thucydides would have praised Athens if he had thought it proper to praise Athens. He left this job to Pericles. The difference between Pericles' funeral speech, which Thucydides wrote, and Thucydides' praise of Athens, which Thucydides wrote only between the lines of his work, gives us an inkling of the gulf separating the political speech from the true speech. The true speech is deliberately incomplete. Thucydides' praise of Athens, and generally the full truth as he saw it, is located in the space between the deeds and the speeches. The full truth is pointed to by the dualism of the deeds and speeches. It is not pointed out.

It would then not be altogether wrong to say that Thucydides' speech, as it is written, is ultimately as untrue as Homer's. But if Homer's speech is untrue because Homer magnifies and adorns, Thucydides' speech is untrue because Thucydides understates the truth. It is possible that this is what Thucydides himself thought. Whether this thought does justice to Homer is a question which it is not improper to raise. This question is identical with the question as to whether or not poetry is more philosophic than history.

We have insensibly returned to our guiding question—the question regarding the specific character of that Greek wisdom which issues in political history. For all practical purposes, this question coincides with the question regarding the difference between Thucydides and Plato. Whereas Thucydides' wisdom issues

in political history, Plato's wisdom issues in political philosophy. I have spoken of the agreement between Plato and Thucydides as regards specific moral and political judgments. Both regard moderation as higher than daring and manliness. Both regard the mixture of oligarchy and democracy as the best practical regime. The recognition of this broad practical agreement makes it all the more urgent that we define, however tentatively, their profound disagreement.

We must compare comparable things. Thucydides did not write Socratic dialogues on justice and the like, and Plato did not write history. But both Plato's dialogues and Thucydides' history have something most important in common: both present the universal truth in inseparable connection with particulars. The role played in Thucydides by the Peloponnesian War was played in Plato by Socrates. Thucydides starts from the experience of the biggest unrest; Plato starts from the experience of the serene citizen philosopher. To explain what this means, we start from a less comprehensive phenomenon. While Plato did not write a history, he has given us the sketch of a history covering the period from the barbarism of the beginnings up to Periclean democracy. I am referring to the third book of the *Laws*. The third book of the *Laws* is the only part of Plato's work which lends itself to a simple confrontation with Thucydides' history.

In the third book of the *Laws* Plato gives a strange account of how the good Athenian regime which obtained at the time of the Persian War, the ancestral regime, was transformed into the extreme democracy of the Periclean age. Plato traces this profound change to the willful disregard of the ancestral laws regarding music and the theater: by making not the best and the wisest but the audience at large the judges of songs and plays, Athens transformed herself from an aristocracy into a democracy. In the same context Plato contends that the significance of the naval victory of Salamis (as distinguished from the land victories of Marathon and Plataea) was negligible. We may say: Plato falsifies history. We must say even more: Plato deliberately falsifies history. This is one reason why he repeatedly calls his historical sketch a myth. Why does he falsify history? In what precisely does the falsification consist? The true reason for the emergence of Athenian democracy was that the Athenians had practically no choice but to wage the naval battle of Salamis and, one thing leading to another, they were practically compelled to build a powerful navy; for the navy they needed the poor as oarsmen; therefore they had to give the

poor a much greater stake in Athens than they previously enjoyed: they were forced to embark on their democratic venture. The true account of what happened between the Persian War and the Peloponnesian War would have shown that the democratization of Athens was not a matter of willful folly, not a matter of choice, but rather a matter of necessity. In general terms, the true account would show that the margin of choice in regard to regimes is extremely limited, or, to paraphrase Plato himself, that it is nature and chance rather than man, rather than human wisdom or folly, which establishes regimes or which legislates (see *Laws* 709a–b). The correct statement of what has happened would incline one to believe in the absolute preponderance of fatality over choice.

We shall then tentatively describe the difference between Plato or political philosophy on the one hand, and Thucydides or political history on the other, as follows: the former puts the emphasis on human choice, the latter puts the emphasis on fatality.

Yet Plato admits implicitly by his falsification of Athenian history, and he admits it later on explicitly, that Thucydides' estimate of the situation is correct: that fatality is preponderant. He only adds that, within very narrow limits, man does have a choice between different regimes. Thucydides does not deny this. Thus there seems to be a perfect agreement between Thucydides and Plato. However, Plato regards the existence of the very small margin of choice in regard to regimes as of decisive importance for understanding political life, whereas Thucydides does not. Man as Plato sees him is distinctly less involved in fatality than man as Thucydides sees him. What is the essential difference behind this apparent difference of degree?

Plato starts from the fact that all political life is characterized by alternatives between better and worse policies, between policies which are believed to be better and policies which are believed to be worse. But it is impossible to believe that something is better without believing at the same time that something is simply good. In other words, every belief that a given policy is preferable is based on reasons which, if duly elaborated, would reveal a belief in what constitutes the best regime. Now, it is necessary to transform this belief into knowledge. It is necessary to seek knowledge of what constitutes the best regime. This quest is political philosophy. Political life is a kind of groping for the best regime. Political life points therefore to political philosophy, which is the conscious quest for the best regime. Now, the quest for the best regime is only the political form of the quest for the good life. Regarding the

good life, there is ultimately only one alternative among serious people: does the good life consist in political action or in philosophy? The question of how to live is a grave practical problem for everyone and hence also for the city.

Thucydides denies that the question of how to live is a grave practical problem for the city. The goals which the city pursues are obvious and cannot be questioned without questioning the city itself. These goals are such things as stability, freedom from both foreign domination and tyranny, and prosperity. The framework within which these goals can be pursued is in each case given. Experience suffices to show that the framework most conducive to the wise pursuit of these goals is a moderate or mixed regime. Statesmanship is the wise or prudent pursuit of the obvious objectives mentioned. It is much more difficult to discern in each case what the statesman-like course of action is than to see what the best regime is and what the ultimate objectives of political life are. But statesmanship consists in the wise handling of individual situations. What can be said about statesmanship without regard to the individual situations is trivial and hardly worthwhile. No problem of principle arises among sensible and moderate statesman. Hence the right kind of political life can only be shown in action. The only question for the wise speaker about politics is: in what action, in what circumstances, can political life be shown in the best manner, i.e., in such a manner that the presentation will reveal most fully the character of political life? The answer is: action on the peak of political life.

We shall now say: Plato regards the ultimate goals of political action as fundamentally problematic, and Thucydides does not. What is the reason for this difference? As I believe I have shown, Thucydides is fully aware of the significance of the conflict between the political life and the life devoted to understanding. But contrary to Plato, Thucydides believes that while the thinker, and only the thinker, can fully understand political life, he cannot guide political life. Philosophy has no point of entrance into political life. Political life is impervious to philosophy. The Peloponnesian War, the biggest unrest, as well as the biggest rest which preceded it, is wholly independent of philosophy. Plato, however, believed that political life is not impervious to philosophy. This explains why his criticism of both Sparta and Athens is much harsher than Thucydides' criticism. Plato expects much more of political life than Thucydides does. According to Plato, the ultimate alternative—political life or philosophical life—affects polit-

ical life itself; according to Thucydides, it does not. This is the reason why for Plato the ultimate goals of political life are fundamentally problematic, whereas they are not for Thucydides.

Plato had tried to show that political life points to the philosophical life. He started from the fact that political life needs excellence, or virtue, and he followed the dialectics of virtue: we may take any notion of virtue, however low and narrow (and there is no political life, however low and narrow, without such notions); we shall be led inevitably by the sheer demand for consistency to the insight that virtue is knowledge, and therefore that political life needs philosophy in order to be truly political life. Thucydides admits the obvious political relevance of virtue. But he insists all the more strongly on the fact that virtue, as far as it is politically relevant, is not, as indeed it presents itself in political speech, the end of political life, but only a means. He thus cuts off the dialectic movement leading up from the political life to the philosophic life. For Plato all human life, even on the lowest level, is directed toward philosophy, toward the highest. Even the most despicable actions of the most despicable demagogue or tyrant can ultimately be understood only as an extreme perversion, due to ignorance, of the same longing for the simply good which in its unperverted form is philosophy. The lower exists only by virtue of the attraction exerted by the higher, by virtue of the power of the higher. Thucydides, on the other hand, denies this directedness of the lower toward the higher. It is for this reason that he regards politics as impervious to philosophy. The lower is impervious to the higher. Whereas the Peloponnesian War and its antecedents are wholly independent of philosophy, philosophy is dependent on them. The lower is independent of the higher, but the higher is dependent on the lower. The high is weak; the low is strong.

Plato had no illusions about the fact that if we limit our observation to human affairs in the narrow sense, Thucydides is right: political life proves again and again its imperviousness to philosophy. But Plato demanded that we take a comprehensive view, that we see human affairs in their connection with human nature, and human nature as a part of the whole; and he contended that if we do this, we shall arrive at the conclusion that the higher is stronger than the lower. The ultimate reason why Plato and Thucydides disagree has to be sought, not in a different estimate of human affairs as such, but in a different view of the whole.

Thucydides held that the primary or fundamental fact is movement or unrest, and that rest is derivative; that the primary and

fundamental fact is barbarism, and that Greekness is derivative; in a word, that war, and not peace, is the father of all things. Plato, on the other hand, believed in the primacy of rest, Greekness, harmony. Plato and Thucydides agree as to this—that for man, rest and Greekness and peace are the highest. But according to Plato, the highest for man and the highest in man is akin to the highest simply, to the principle or principles governing the whole; whereas according to Thucydides, the highest in man is not akin to the highest simply. According to Plato, the highest in man, man's humanity, has direct cosmic support. According to Thucydides, the highest in man lacks such support: man's humanity is too remote from the elements to be capable of receiving such support.

This difference explains the difference of moods conveyed by the Platonic dialogues on one hand and Thucydides' history on the other. The serenity of Plato corresponds to his gay science, to his comforting message that the highest is the strongest. A light veil of sadness covers Thucydides' somber wisdom; the highest is of extreme fragility.

For Thucydides the cause of the wisdom which found its home in Periclean Athens is Periclean Athens. For Plato, Periclean Athens is merely the condition, and not the cause, of Athenian wisdom. Thucydides, we may say, identifies condition and cause; Plato distinguishes between condition and cause. Hence politics is of decisive importance for Thucydides and is not of decisive importance for Plato. According to Plato, the cause of wisdom is the unknown god whose puppets we are.

The difference between Thucydides and Plato is identical with the difference between Thucydides and Socrates. Thucydides, we shall say, is a pre-Socratic. His work can only be understood against the background of pre-Socratic philosophy, and especially against the background of Heraclitus' thought. Pre-Socratic philosophy was a quest for an understanding of the whole which was not identical with understanding of the parts of the whole. It is for this reason that pre-Socratic philosophy did not know of a relatively independent study of the human things as such. Pre-Socratic philosophy needed, therefore, something like Thucydides' history as its supplement: a quest for the truth which was primarily a quest for the truth about the human things.

Socrates identified the understanding of the whole with understanding of the parts of the whole. Socratic philosophy allowed, therefore, a study of the nature of human things as such. With the emergence of Socratic philosophy, political history in the full Thu-

cydidean sense loses its *raison d'être*. This explains why Xenophon continued Thucydides' history in such a different spirit and in such a different style. Xenophon's center of gravity lies no longer in political history but in his recollection of Socrates. This explains the apparent frivolity of Xenophon's account of things political. Xenophon could no longer take politics as seriously as Thucydides had done. His apparent frivolity as a historian is the reflection of Socratic serenity. By virtue of the Socratic revolution, political history became eventually a specialty, ancillary to philosophy and distinguished from it, a highly respectable specialty, but none the less a specialty. According to the traditional notion, political history provides examples, whereas moral and political philosophy provide the precepts.

The subordinate status into which history declined owing to the Socratic revolution remained unchanged for many centuries. History remained, however, political history. It is only since the eighteenth century or so that history has become the history of civilization. This change presented itself as an enormous progress, as an enormous step forward towards the comprehension of human life or of society as it really is or has been. This change finds its clearest expression in the fact that whereas for classical philosophy the comprehensive theme of social science is the best regime, the comprehensive theme of modern social science is civilization or culture. If we ask our contemporaries what constitutes a culture or a civilization, we do not receive a clear answer. Instead we are told how we could tell one civilization from another. Civilizations, we are told, can be distinguished from each other most clearly by the differences of artistic styles. This means that civilizations are distinguished from each other least ambiguously by something which is never in the focus of interest of societies: societies do not wage war and do not make revolutions on account of differences of artistic style. The orientation by civilizations thus appears to be based on a remarkable estrangement from those life-and-death issues which animate societies and keep them in motion. What presents itself as an enormous progress, as an enormous enlargement of our views, is in fact the outcome of the oblivion of the most fundamental things, and ultimately of the oblivion of the one thing needful. History is still primarily political history.